

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAN JO 02146 060021Z

62

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 EB-11 AGR-20 COME-00 IO-14 DRC-01 AID-20 /161 W

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P R 052338Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7204

INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 2146

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRD, CS, PFOR

SUBJECT: PRESS REACTION TO ALLEGED STANDARD
FRUIT ASSASSINATION PLOT

REF: (A) SAN JOSE 2108; (B) STATE 117323

1. PANAMANIAN AMBASSADOR PERE'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE STANDARD FRUIT COMPANY HAD HIRED ASSASSINS TO KILL PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT TORRIJOS AND OVERTHROW COSTA RICAN PRESIDENT ODUBER AND HONDURAN PRESIDENT LOPEZ HIT THE LOCAL PRESS YESTERDAY (JUNE 4) MORNING. COVERAGE WAS MOSTLY LIMITED TO REPORTING PERE'S COMMENTS. THE ONLY PAPER OFFERING EDITORIAL COMMENT WAS THE SENSATIONALIST JOURNAL LA HORA, WHICH PREDICTABLY, CAME OUT TODAY WITH A DENOUNCEMENT OF STANDARD AND A CALL FOR EXPROPRIATION AND EXPULSION OF STANDARD PERSONNEL FROM COSTA RICA.

2. REPORTS IN THIS MORNING'S PAPERS CONTINUED TO BE MODERATE. COVERAGE WAS GIVEN TO STANDARD FRUIT'S
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 SAN JO 02146 060021Z

DENIAL OF PERE'S ACCUSATION AND THE COMPANY'S

DEMAND THAT PERE MAKE PUBLIC ANY EVIDENCE HE HAS. REPORTS ALSO INDICATE THAT THE COMPANY MAY SEEK AN INVESTIGATION OF PERE'S CHARGE THROUGH THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT AND THE OAS.

3. PRESIDENT ODUBER'S REACTION SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT HE MAY NOT BE TAKING THE ACCUSATION VERY SERIOUSLY. ODUBER PRETTY MUCH LIMITED HIMSELF TO A STAMENT TO THE EFFECT THAT IN COSTA RICA IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT BECAUSE OF THE POPULAR SUPPORT IT HAS AND BECAUSE OF THE COMMITMENT OF THE COSTA RICAN PEOPLE TO DUE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS.

4. OTHER COVERAGE REPORTED THAT PANAMANIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE ARRESTED SOME SUSPECTS BUT THAT PRESIDENT TORRIJOS, WHILE ADMITTING THE EXISTENCE OF A PLOT, HAS REFUSED TO NAME THE PEOPLE BEHIND IT AND LIMITED HIS DESCRIPTION TO "A MULTI-NATIONAL FIRM AND A SHIPPING FIRM." IN ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT, PANAMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER TACK WAS SAID TO HAVE CONFIRMED THE EXISTENCE OF THE ASSASSINATION PLOT BUT TO HAVE DEFERRED TO SECRET SERVICE CHIEF MANUAL NORIEGA FOR DETAILS.

5. LA NACION CARRIED A PAID ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE ASSOCIATED BANANA FARMERS --I, E. THE GROWERS WHO SELL BANANAS TO STANDARD FRUIT -- DECRYING THE CAMPAING OF DEFAMATION, CULMINATING IN PERE'S ACCUSATION, WHICH AS BEEN WAGED AGAINST A "MODEL" COMPANY.

6. IT IS SIGNIFICANT TO NOTE THAT NEITHER LA NACION NOR LA REPUBLICA HAVE YET GIVEN EDITORIAL COVERAGE TO THIS STORY.

7. COMMENT. FROM THE PRESS COVERAGE AND CONVERSATIONS IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE ASSASSINATION CHARGE IS NOT BEING TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY. PARTLY REFLECTING THIS IS THE LACK SO FAR OF ANY STUDENT REACTION;
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 SAN JO 02146 060021Z

ALTHOUGH, OF COURSE, WE DO NOT RLE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOME SUCH REACTION MAY YET MATERIALIZE. THE GENERAL SENSE OF COSTA RICAN PUBLIC OPINION DOES NOT CREDIT THE PERE CHARGES WITH SUBSTANCE.
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